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Terrorists Closing Atom Gap, CIA Says

While the possibility of a nuclear holocaust is of paramount concern to world leaders, a more likely threat is worrying intelligence analysts: The increasing danger that some irresponsible terrorist group will acquire a nuclear bomb or the material with which to make one.

This is no wild-eyed fantasy dreamed up by scriptwriters for a Hollywood disaster epic. It's a dead-serious appraisal by the cold-eyed men of the Central Intelligence Agency, who have been keeping track of terrorist groups for years.

In fact, intelligence experts told my associate Dale Van Atta, there is no question in their minds that sooner or later terrorists will achieve nuclear "capability"—and their guess before the end of this decade.

The CIA recently reported that while the number of international terrorist incidents had decreased somewhat in 1979, the actual destructive violence of their operations had increased.

What the public report left out, however, were the ominous conclusions of a secret CIA document: "If the current trend of increasing terrorist violence continues, we would expect a corresponding erosion of the constraints against terrorist use of nuclear explosives."

What has stopped them so far? "Terrorists are and will continue to be greatly sensitive to the quantity and quality of security systems protecting nuclear weapons and the material from which nuclear explosives might be made," the report states.

Because weapons are guarded more closely than nuclear ingredients, the report concludes, a terrorist group will

most likely try to steal the material and make its own bomb. "None of the individual steps involved would be beyond the capabilities of a sophisticated, well-funded group," the CIA warns.

The CIA analysts figure that of known terrorist groups, "the most competent" for a nuclear attempt would be "one of the Palestinian groups," possibly in collaboration with Western European terrorists and/or the "Japanese Red Army."

For what cold comfort it provides, the CIA analysis predicts that nuclear-armed terrorists would be most likely to use their bomb as "a credible threat for blackmail and/or publicity," rather than for a direct attack. "In a extreme situation, however, some might attempt a detonation," the report warns.

Memo to the President—There's only one way to end this nation's dangerous dependence on foreign oil. We must develop alternative fuels.

The CIA expects the Soviet Union to cross the great divide into oil dependency within a year. Soon the two superpowers will be competing for Persian Gulf oil. Your strategic advisers have warned that the resulting confrontation could lead to World War III.

The crisis can be defused simply by finding some other fuel to operate our automobiles, trucks and tractors. For years, I have been calling for an emergency alternative fuel crash program. I believe the nation that landed the first men on the moon can develop a substitute for oil.

But it will take another Manhattan Project, mobilizing all the resources of the United States. We must draft the best scientists, engineers and managers from American industry, not just those the corporations consider

expedient. We must make this the nation's first priority, not just a subject for political rhetoric.

The first task is to overcome the obstruction of the oil companies, which are quietly blocking the development of new fuels until they have squeezed every last dollar out of every last available oil well. True, they're studying alternative fuels, because they know their wells eventually will run dry. But the time has come to stop studying and start developing oil substitutes.

Political Potpourri—Both the Democratic and Republican national chairmen have held worried consultations with party leaders about the huge number of undecided voters. They're worried that the November election could be thrown into the House of Representatives, with irreparable damage to the two-party system. . . . Republican favorite Ronald Reagan has been criticized for his short, sharp, simplistic answers to complex issues. Republicans seem to love this style, but there aren't enough registered Republicans to win the election for him. . . . Some GOP moderates in Congress, who've had their doubts about Reagan all along, are now saying: they're afraid President Carter will chew him up in any campaign debate. The GOP doubters fear Carter's careful, detailed responses to questions will make him appear more knowledgeable than Reagan. . . . The California Democratic primary looks like a toss-up, with most blacks for Carter, most Hispanics for Kennedy and most others undecided. . . . Carter is not popular in Ohio, but neither is Kennedy. The latest polls show Carter ahead in next week's crucial primary.